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The key role of non-profit non-governmental organisations (NGO) in the fight against antibiotic resistance: the example of WAAAR

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The role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has been key for many diseases in the past. Such is the case for antimicrobial resistance (AMR), which nowadays represents a very serious and worldwide public health threat. Associations like APUA, ReAct and the World Alliance Against Antibiotic Resistance (WAAAR) are devoted to the continuous fight against AMR.

This article will look at the example of WAAAR, created in 2011, which has undertaken many initiatives. Initially set up in France, WAAAR has been very successful in communicating with politicians and health deciders in order to bring their attention to the topic of AMR. They became anxious when they saw the sharp increase in *E.coli* resistance to cephalosporins, and the high number of deaths and the costs associated with AMR. In a worldwide competition within the European Union, WAAAR came in third place, behind two NGOs which are mostly active on animal health.

Strong programmes, which have been in place in France since 2000, have been reinforced, in particular for surveillance of AMR, in close cooperation with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). In 2014, WAAAR organised a worldwide declaration on AMR which has been widely disseminated and very successful. A very informative newsletter, *AMR-Times*, was established, as well as a yearly publication—*AMR Control*. *AMR Control* has seen the highest level of participation including an introduction by WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros, in 2018, UN Interagency Coordination on Antimicrobial Resistance Group in 2019 and the participation of many key players and countries, from CARB-X to China, Germany, Japan, Senegal, Switzerland, the USA Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) to name a few. Articles can be downloaded at www.amrcontrol.info

Presently, the association gathers more than 750 people from 60 different countries belonging to all continents. Since the creation of WAAAR, we decided to set up a multi-disciplinary Executive Committee with clinicians (in particular ID people), microbiologists, intensivists, infection control specialists, veterinarians, non-medical members very active in the field of AMR and members of consumer organisations. We always considered that the multi-disciplinary case-mix of the Executive Committee is key for the efficacy of the various NGOs in the field of AMR.

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In the last few years, we have participated in many activities and working groups—in particular with WHO, the United Nations and ESCMID to name only a few. The cooperation with European scientific societies has become stronger and stronger. To give an example, WAAAR has been involved with ESICM and ESCMID in a scientific group devoted to the fight against AMR in the intensive care units (called Antarctica). A paper was published on this issue by the group², and an international prevalence study is ongoing.

WAAAR is active in several important scientific and research programmes, such as EU-AMRAI, Joint Action Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare-Associated Infections (JAMRAI) and European Committee on Infection Control (EUCIC) — the latest being a large European group that works on infection control, healthcare-associated infections and AMR.

In the two last years, we have developed a large communication programme targeting politicians, people from the National Assembly and the Senate, as well as VIPs from each region, and mayors.

Eighty per cent of antibiotic consumption comes from the community, and it is key to develop strong programmes in this area. Cooperation with GPs has

been very weak in the past, and the participation of GPs in national working groups and task forces has been minimal for several reasons—in particular their very dense agenda. We will organise the main structures representing general practice, including several syndicates and a national action based on communication, information and education. This programme must be decided and driven by GPs themselves since, at least in France, they dislike drastic top down measures coming from politicians and paymasters. To initiate the campaign, many top French experts came together to publish “A Policy to Combat Antibiotic Resistance – An Implementation Manual”. The key document has been translated into English and became a hot item at the United Nations World Health Assembly and other meetings, in both French and English!

There are many projects planned for the future. WAAAR intends to facilitate the fight against AMR in low- and middle- income countries, particularly African ones, in cooperation with WHO and many players such as the Merieux Foundation, the Wellcome Trust and Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders). Stronger cooperation with East European countries (such as Russia), India and China is also necessary. There are already some actions ongoing with those countries.

Finally, we think that important and long-term actions and programmes should be developed, coming from strong cooperation of the main NGOs. This never really happened in the past, mostly due to the competition between these. We think however, that cooperation between NGOs such as APUA / ISAC, ReAct and international consumer organisations would be synergistic and stronger—particularly in lobbying politicians, national European or international deciders and the public. Joint sessions could also be proposed to the large scientific societies.

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